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NatGeo seeks to highlight Southern Sierra attractions

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Photo by Mike Bodine

Mt. Whitney is just one of the many attractions in the Eastern Sierra that may be nominated for National Geographic's Geotourism program, which, when complete, will include a map of California with links to attractions, events and other recreational opportunities. Nominations are now open for the new Southern Sierra portion of the project.

Inyo County is once again teaming up with National Geographic, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and the Sierra Business Council to educate potential visitors on the region's many attractions. To assist in the effort, residents are invited to visit www.sierranevadageotourism.org and nominate their favorite restaurants, trails, attractions and geographic features for inclusion on a map of California.

"This is a great opportunity for residents of the southern Sierra to promote and share the special and unique places, festivals, events, restaurants, and historical points of interest with visitors to the region who are looking for a deeper Sierra experience," said SBC Geotourism Project Manager Nicole DeJonghe. "The type of information you find on the map is the kind you would get through having dinner with locals."

Jon Klusmire, Inyo County Museum Services director and member of the NatGeo review board, said that nominating local attractions for the new Southern Sierra map will "have Inyo associated with places like Tahoe and Yosemite. This website kind of presents the whole Eastern Sierra as a region."

Klusmire said the regional advertising will be a healthy boost to the Inyo County economy because, currently, the county does not have the name recognition that Yosemite and Tahoe enjoy. The idea is for people who are planning trips to destination areas such as Yosemite or Death Valley to be able to access the website and see what else is offered nearby.

"The Sierra Nevada region has many iconic symbols that attract millions of visitors annually from around the world," said SNC Executive Officer Jim Branham. "The Sierra Nevada

Geotourism website is now making it possible for visitors to learn about hundreds of other less well-known destinations in the Sierra that will enrich their next visit here.”

When the website launched last year, residents were invited to nominate attractions in or around the gateway to Yosemite. That call resulted in areas such as the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest and Benton Hot Springs earning nominations, as well as several local museums and restaurants. The new map is for areas of the Southern Sierra, from Kings Canyon across the Sierra Crest to Inyo County. This map will also reach as far south as Kern County.

Klusmire suggested nominated areas such as the Whitney Portal or local rock art. As nominations come in they will be posted on the Southern Sierra map, with a note that says the nomination is pending. Before it is permanently posted to the site, the Geotourism council will review each submission, along with representative from the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management to be sure no sensitive sites are included on the map.

Klusmire also said that residents are invited to continue nominating sites for other regions of the Eastern Sierra, which will be added to the appropriate geotourism map. Currently the geotourism website is receiving upwards of 2,000 hits a month. “This is a nice Internet advertising approach,” Klusmire said. “We have all the chambers on board and are just waiting for nominations.”